

Pashto

Pashto (/'pʌʃtəʊ/,[9][10][11] /'pæʃtəʊ/,[Note 1] پښتو / Pa᷍tō, [pəʂtɔ:]), sometimes spelled **Pukhto** or **Pakhto**,[Note 2] is a language in the Eastern Iranian group of the Indo-European family. It is known in Persian literature as **Afghani** (افغاني) [14] and in Hindustani literature as **Paṭhāni**.^[15] Speakers of the language are called **Pashtuns** or Pukhtuns/Pakhtuns (historically known as ethnic *Afghans*).^{[16][17][18][19]} Pashto and Dari (Persian) are the two official languages of Afghanistan.^{[20][5][21]} Pashto is also the second-largest regional language of Pakistan, mainly spoken in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and northern districts of Balochistan province in south-west.^{[22][23]} Pashto is the primary language of the Pashtun diaspora around the world. The total number of Pashto-speakers is at least 40 million,^[4] although some estimates place it as high as 60 million.^[2]

Pashto belongs to the Northeastern Iranian group of the Indo-Iranian branch,^{[24][25]} but *Ethnologue* lists it as Southeastern Iranian.^[26] Pashto has two main dialect groups, "soft" and "hard", the latter locally known as *Pakhto* or *Paxto*.^[16]

Pashto پښتو Pa᷍tō
The word <i>Pa᷍tō</i> written in the Pashto alphabet
Pronunciation ['pəʂtɔ:], ['pʊxtɔ:]
Native to Afghanistan and Pakistan
Ethnicity Pashtuns
Native speakers 40 million (2000s) ^{[1][2][3][4]}
Language family Indo-European <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indo-Iranian ▪ Iranian ▪ Eastern Iranian ▪ Pashto
Standard forms Central Pashto Northern Pashto Southern Pashto
Dialects Pashto dialects
Writing system Perso-Arabic script (Pashto alphabet)
Official status
Official language in Afghanistan ^[5]
Recognised minority language in Pakistan ^[6] Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Balochistan
Regulated by Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan Pashto Academy, Pakistan ^[7]
Language codes
ISO 639-1 ps (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ps) – Pashto, Pushto
ISO 639-2 pus (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=366) – Pushto, Pashto
ISO 639-3 pus – inclusive code – Pashto, Pushto Individual codes: pst – Central Pashto pbu – Northern Pashto pbt – Southern Pashto wne – Wanetsi
Glottolog pash1269 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/pash1269) Pashto ^[8]
Linguasphere 58-ABD-a

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Geographic distribution

As a national language of Afghanistan,^[27] Pashto is primarily spoken in the east, south, and southwest, but also in some northern and western parts of the country. The exact number of speakers is unavailable, but different estimates show that Pashto is the mother tongue of 45–60%^{[28][29][30][31]} of the total population of Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, Pashto is spoken by 15% of its population,^{[32][33]} mainly in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and northern districts of Balochistan province. Pashto-speakers are found in other major cities of Pakistan, most notably in Karachi, Sindh.^[34]

Other communities of Pashto speakers are found in India, Tajikistan,^[35] and northeastern Iran (primarily in South Khorasan Province to the east of Qaen, near the Afghan border).^[36] In India most ethnic Pashtun (Pathan) peoples speak the geographically native Hindi-Urdu language instead of Pashto. However small numbers of Pashto speakers exist in India, namely the Sheen Khalai in Rajasthan,^[37] and the Pathan community in the city of Kolkata, often nicknamed the *Kabuliwala* ("people of Kabul").^{[38][39]}

In addition, sizable Pashtun diaspora also exist in Western Asia, especially in the United Arab Emirates,^[40] Saudi Arabia. The Pashtun diaspora speaks Pashto in countries like the United States, United Kingdom,^[41] Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Qatar, Australia, Japan, Russia, New Zealand, etc.

Afghanistan

Pashto is one of the two official languages of Afghanistan, along with Dari Persian.^[42] Since the early 18th century, the monarchs of Afghanistan have been ethnic Pashtuns (except for Habibullāh Kalakāni in 1929).^[43] Persian, the literary language of the royal court,^[44] was more widely used in government institutions while the Pashtun tribes spoke Pashto as their native tongue. King Amanullah Khan began promoting Pashto during his reign (1926–1929) as a marker of ethnic identity and as a symbol of "official nationalism"^[43] leading

Afghanistan to independence after the defeat of the British Empire in the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919. In the 1930s a movement began to take hold to promote Pashto as a language of government, administration, and art with the establishment of a Pashto Society Pashto Anjuman in 1931^[45] and the inauguration of the Kabul University in 1932 as well as the formation of the Pashto Academy Pashto Tolana in 1937.^[46]

Although officially supporting the use of Pashto, the Afghan elite regarded Persian as a "sophisticated language and a symbol of cultured upbringing".^[43] King Zahir Shah (reigned 1933–1973) thus followed suit after his father Nadir Khan had decreed in 1933 that officials were to study and utilize both Persian and Pashto.^[47] In 1936 a royal decree of Zahir Shah formally granted to Pashto the status of an official language^[48] with full rights to usage in all aspects of government and education – despite the fact that the ethnically Pashtun royal family and bureaucrats mostly spoke Persian.^[46] Thus Pashto became a national language, a symbol for Pashtun nationalism.

The constitutional assembly reaffirmed the status of Pashto as an official language in 1964 when Afghan Persian was officially renamed to Dari.^{[49][50]}

The lyrics of the national anthem of Afghanistan are in Pashto.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, Pashto is the first language of 15% of its population (as of 1998),^{[51][52]} mainly in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and northern districts of Balochistan province. It is also spoken in parts of Mianwali and Attock districts of the Punjab province, areas of Gilgit-Baltistan and in Islamabad, as well as by Pashtuns who live in different cities throughout the country. Modern Pashto-speaking communities are found in the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh.^{[34][53][54][55][55]}

Urdu and English are the two official languages of Pakistan. Pashto has no official status at the federal level. On a provincial level, Pashto is the regional language of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and north Balochistan.^[56] The primary medium of education in government schools in Pakistan is Urdu,^[57] but from 2014 onwards, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has placed more emphasis on English as the medium of instruction.^[58] This has caused growing resentment amongst Pashtuns, who also complain that Pashto is often neglected officially.^{[59][60]}

[61]



Play media
A native speaker speaking Pashto

History

A number of linguists have argued that Pashto is descended from Avestan or a variety very similar to it.^{[19][24]} However, the position that Pashto, or any other Iranian language, is a direct descendant of Avestan is not agreed upon. What scholars agree on is the fact that Pashto is an Eastern Iranian language sharing characteristics with Eastern Middle Iranian languages such as Khwarezmian, Sogdian and Bactrian.^[62]

Strabo, who lived between 64 BC and 24 CE, explains that the tribes inhabiting the lands west of the Indus River were part of Ariana. This was around the time when the area inhabited by the Pashtuns was governed by the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom. From the 3rd century CE onward, they are mostly referred to by the name Afghan (Abgan).^{[63][64][65][14]}

Scholars such as Abdul Hai Habibi and others believe that the earliest modern Pashto work dates back to Amir Kror Suri of the early Ghurid period in the eighth century, and they use the writings found in Pata Khazana. However, this is disputed by several modern experts such as David Neil MacKenzie and Lucia Serena Loi.^{[66][67]} Pata Khazana is a Pashto manuscript^[68] claimed to be written by Mohammad Hotak under the patronage of the Pashtun emperor Hussain Hotak in Kandahar. Pata Khazana claims to contain an anthology of Pashto poets from the early Ghurid period up to the Hotak period in the eighteenth century.^[67]

From the 16th century, Pashto poetry became very popular among the Pashtuns. Some of those who wrote in Pashto are Bayazid Pir Roshan (a major inventor of the Pashto alphabet), Khushal Khan Khattak, Rahman Baba, Nazo Tokhi, and Ahmad Shah Durrani, founder of the modern state of Afghanistan or the Durrani Empire.

In modern times, noticing the incursion of Persian and Arabic vocabulary, there is a strong desire to "purify" Pashto by restoring its old vocabulary.^{[69][70][71]}

Grammar

Pashto is a subject-object-verb (SOV) language with split ergativity. Adjectives come before nouns. Nouns and adjectives are inflected for two genders (masc./fem.),^[72] two numbers (sing./plur.), and four cases (direct, oblique I, oblique II and vocative). There is also an inflection for the subjunctive mood. The verb system is very intricate with the following tenses: present, simple past, past progressive, present perfect, and past perfect. The sentence construction of Pashto has similarities with some other Indo-Iranian languages such as Prakrit and Bactrian. The possessor precedes the possessed in the genitive construction. The verb generally agrees with the subject in both transitive and intransitive sentences. An exception occurs when a completed action is reported in any of the past tenses (simple past, past progressive, present perfect, or past perfect). In such cases, the verb agrees with the subject if it is intransitive, but if it is transitive, it agrees with the object,^[27] therefore Pashto shows a partly ergative behaviour. Like Kurdish, but unlike most other Indo-Iranian languages, Pashto uses all three types of adpositions – prepositions, postpositions, and circumpositions.

Phonology

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Mid	e	ə	o
Open	a		ɑ

Consonants

	<u>L</u> abial	<u>D</u> enti- <u>a</u> lveolar	<u>R</u> etroflex	<u>P</u> ost- <u>a</u> lveolar	<u>P</u> alatal	<u>V</u> elar	<u>U</u> vular	<u>G</u> lottal
<u>N</u> asal	m	n	ɳ			ɳ		
<u>P</u> losive	p b	t d	t̪ d̪			k g	q	
<u>A</u> ffricate		ts dz		tʃ dʒ				
<u>F</u> ricative	f	s z	ʂ ~ ç ʐ ~ ɿ	ɬ ɻ		x χ		h
<u>A</u> pproximant		l			j	w		
<u>R</u> hotic		r	ɻ					

Phonemes that have been borrowed, thus non-native to Pashto, are colour-coded. The phonemes /q/ and /f/ tend to be replaced by [k] and [p] respectively.^[73]

The retroflex lateral flap /ɻ/ (ɿ or ɭ) is pronounced as retroflex approximant [ɻ] when final.^{[74][75]}

The retroflex fricatives /ʂ, ʐ/ and palatal fricatives /ç, j/ represent dialectally different pronunciations of the same sound, not separate phonemes. In particular, the retroflex fricatives, which represent the original pronunciation of these sounds, are preserved in the southern/southwestern dialects (especially the prestige dialect of Kandahar), while they are pronounced as palatal fricatives in the west-central dialects. Other dialects merge the original retroflexes with other existing sounds: The southeastern dialects merge them with the postalveolar fricatives /ʃ, ʒ/, while the northern/northeastern dialects merge them with the velar phonemes in an asymmetric pattern, pronouncing them as /χ, ʁ/ (**not** /χ̪/). Furthermore, according to Henderson (1983),^[18] the west-central voiced palatal fricative /j/ actually occurs only in the Wardak Province, and is merged into /g/ elsewhere in the region.

The velars /k, g, x, χ/ followed by the close back rounded vowel /u/ assimilate into the labialized velars [kʷ, gʷ, xʷ, χʷ].

Voiceless stops [p, t, k] are all unaspirated, like Spanish, other Romance languages, and Austronesian languages; they have slightly aspirated allophones prevocalically in a stressed syllable.

Vocabulary

In Pashto, most of the native elements of the lexicon are related to other [Eastern Iranian languages](#). Some words are related to [Ancient Greek dialects](#). However, a remarkably large number of words are unique to Pashto.^[24] Post-7th century borrowings came primarily from [Persian language](#) and [Hindi-Urdu](#), with Arabic words being borrowed through those two languages, but sometimes directly.^{[76][77]} Modern speech borrows words from English, French, and German.^[78]

Here is an exemplary list of Pure Pashto and borrowings:^[79]

Pashto	Persian	Arabic	Meaning
چاپار chopāṛ	چاپار chāpar	خديمه khidmāh	service
جهش hatsa	کوشش kušeš	جهد jahd	effort/try
پرکړه prekra	گزيره gazire	قرار qarār	decision
ملګري، ملګاري malga'ay, malgare	دوست dost	صديق ṣadīq	friend

Writing system

Pashto employs the [Pashto alphabet](#), a modified form of the [Perso-Arabic alphabet](#) or [Arabic script](#).^[80] In the 16th century, [Bayazid Pir Roshan](#) introduced 13 new letters to the Pashto alphabet. The alphabet was further modified over the years.

The Pashto alphabet consists of 45 letters^[81] and 4 diacritic marks. The following table gives the letters' isolated forms, along with the Latin equivalents and typical IPA values:

ج	ج	ث	ت	پ	ب
ذ	د	خ	ش	خ	ح
س	ش	ز	ڑ	ر	د
ف	غ	خ	ظ	ض	ص
و	ن	م	ل	ک	ق
ئ	ئ	ئ	ئ	ئ	ھ

The Pashto Alphabet

In January 2019, Anwar Wafi Hayat, Afghan researcher and writer proposed new Latin based alphabet for Pashto^[82] His findings outline that the current Perso-Arabic script is a misfit for Pashto language and hinders literacy and economic development. Latin based Pashto alphabet, called Rumi Pashto script, consists of 42 letters and the writer believes if implemented, will make literacy and language acquisition easy.

No	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		12		13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Latin	Aa	Āā	Bb	Cc	Dd	ঃঃ	Ee	ঃঃ	ঃঃ	Ff	Gg		ঃঃ		Hh	Ii	ିି	Jj	ିି	Kk	Ll	Mm
Arabic	ز	أ، آ	ب	خ	د	و	ي	ة	غ	ف	گ			خ	ه	ز، ز	ي	ج	ژ	ک	ل	م
No	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32		33		34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41
Latin	ঃঃ	Oo	Pp	Rr	ঃঃ	Ss	ঃঃ	ঃঃ	Tt	Tt	/kh		ঃঃ		Uu	Üū	Ww	Yy	Zz	ংং	Ay	Ai
Arabic	ن	و	پ	ر	ر	س،	ش	بن	ت	ت	خ		ج		ঃঃ	”	ও	ই	ং	ই	ই	ই

The following table contains Pashto text i-e Afghanistan National Anthem in the new Rumi alphabet.

Paštō in Rūmī Script	Pashto in Arabic Script
Millī Surūd	ملي سروه
Dā watan Afgēānistān day	دا وطن افغانستان دی
Dā izzat də har Afēān day	دا عزت د هر افغان دی
Kor də sole kor də tūre	کور د سولې کور د توړې
Har bačay ye kahramān day	هر بچې یې قهرمان دی
Dā watan də ṭolo kor day	دا وطن د توولو کور دی
Də Baločo, də uzbako	د بلوچو د ازبکو
Də Paštūn aw Hazārao	د پشتون او هزاروو
Də Turkmano, Də Tājiko	د ترکمنو د تاجیکو
Wərsara Arab Gūjar dī	ورسراه عرب کو جردی
Pāmīrīyān, Nūristānyān	پامیریان نورستانیان
Brāhawī dī, Kazalbāš dī,	براهوی دی، کازلباش دی
Hum Aymāk, hum paššāiyān	هم ایماق هم پشتویان
Dā hewād ba təl žaleğī	دا هیواد به تل خلبری
Laka ləmar pər ūnə āsmān	لکه لم پر شمہ آسمان
Pə sīna ke də Asyā ba	په سینه کې د آسیا به
Laka z̄ə wī jāwedān	لکه زرہ وي جاویدان
Nūm də haq mo day rahbar	نوم د حق مو دی رهبر
Wāyū Allāho Akbar, Wāyū Allāho Akbar	وايو الله اکبر، وايو الله اکبر

Dialects

Pashto dialects are divided into two varieties, the "soft" southern variety *Paštiō*, and the "hard" northern variety *Paxtō* (Pakhtu).^[16] Each variety is further divided into a number of dialects. The southern dialect of Wanetsi is the most distinctive Pashto dialect.

1. Southern variety

- *Durrani* dialect (or *Southern* dialect)
- *Kakar* dialect (or *Southeastern* dialect)
- *Shirani* dialect
- *Mandokhel* dialect
- *Marwat-Bettani* dialect
- *Wanetsi* dialect
- **Southern Karlani group**

- *Khattak* dialect
- *Banuchi* dialect
- *Dawarwola* dialect
- *Masidwola* dialect
- *Wazirwola* dialect

2. Northern variety

- *Central Ghilji* dialect (or *Northwestern* dialect)

- *Northern* dialect (or *Eastern* dialect)
- *Yusufzai* dialect (or *Northeastern* dialect)
- **Northern Karlani group**

- *Taniwola* dialect
- *Khosti* dialect
- *Zadran* dialect
- *Bangash-Orakzai-Turi-Zazi-Mangal* dialect
- *Afriди* dialect
- *Khogyani* dialect
- *Wardak* dialect

Literature

Pashto-speakers have long had a tradition of oral literature, including proverbs, stories, and poems. Written Pashto literature saw a rise in development in the 17th century mostly due to poets like Khushal Khan Khattak (1613–1689), who, along with Rahman Baba (1650–1715), is widely regarded as among the greatest Pashto poets. From the time of Ahmad Shah Durrani (1722–1772), Pashto has been the language of the court. The first Pashto teaching text was written during the period of Ahmad Shah Durrani by Pir Mohammad Kakar with the title of *Ma 'rifat al-Afghānī* ("The Knowledge of Afghani [Pashto]"). After that, the first grammar book of Pashto verbs was written in 1805 under the title of *Riyāz al-Maḥabbah* ("Training in Affection") through the patronage of Nawab Mahabat Khan, son of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, chief of the Barech. Nawabullah Yar Khan, another son of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, in 1808 wrote a book of Pashto words entitled '*Ajāyib al-Lughāt*' ("Wonders of Languages").

Poetry example

An excerpt from the *Kalām of Rahman Baba*:

زه رهمان پېچلہ کرم یعنی میں یعنی
چې دا وړنګون پی کوئی نرم په

IPA: Zə ra.man pə xpəl.a gram jəm tʃe ma.jən jəm
tʃe də nor tə.pan me bo.li gram pə tsə

Transliteration: Zə Rahmān pə xpəla gram yəm če mayən yəm
Če də nor təpan me boli gram pə tsə

Translation: "I Rahman, myself am guilty that I am a lover,
On what does this other universe call me guilty."

Proverbs

Pashto also has a rich heritage of proverbs (Pashto *matalūna*, sg. *matal*).^{[83][84]} An example of a proverb:

اوې په دلک نه بلهزی

Transliteration: Uba pə qlang na beliži

Translation: "One cannot divide water by [hitting it with] a pole."

See also

- Indo-European languages
- Eastern Iranian languages
- Pre-Islamic scripts in Afghanistan
- Languages of Pakistan

Notes

1. The only American pronunciation listed by *Oxford Online Dictionaries* is /'pæʃtoʊ/.^[12]
2. Sometimes spelled "Pushtu" or "Pushto",^{[10][11]} and then either pronounced the same^[13] or differently.^{[10][11]} The spelling "Pakhto" is so rare that it is not even mentioned by any major English dictionaries nor recognized by major English-Pashto dictionaries such as *Thepashto.com*, and it is specifically listed by *Ethnologue* only as an alternative name for Northern Pashto, and not Southern or Central Pashto.

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22. Population by Mother Tongue (<http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/tables/POPULATION%20BY%20MOTHER%20TONGUE.pdf>), Population Census – *Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan*
23. Proof-error. This article claims in text (A) this language spoken in West/Northwestern Afghanistan, but (B) map shows regions colored in East/Southeast. It's unclear which reference is inaccurate, the text or the map?
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- Pashto Dictionary with Phonetic Keyboard & Auto-Suggestion (<http://www.thepashto.com/>)
- Pashto Phonetic Keyboard (<https://pukhtoogle.com/pashto>)
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